

APPENDIX B

Toronto Public Health

Public Opinion Survey for the Phase-Out of Non-Essential Outdoor Pesticide Use

Final Report – Executive Summary

Prepared by:
Smaller World Communications
8939 Yonge Street, Unit 204
Richmond Hill, Ontario
L4C 0L5

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Smaller World Communications

Report prepared by:

Jennifer Yessis, Ph.D.
Research Director

Barb van Maris, M.Sc.
Company Leader

Ada Hui
Research Assistant

Executive Summary

Since 1998 the City of Toronto has been exploring ways to reduce the use of pesticides outdoors. Beginning in November 2001, the City of Toronto has sought public input on “strategies to phase out the non-essential, outdoor uses of pesticides on private property” (City of Toronto Council Motion, November 6, 2001). In order to obtain additional input from residents, a telephone survey was conducted to determine the public’s opinion on strategies to reduce the use of pesticides. Smaller World Communications (SWC), an independent research company, was contracted by Toronto Public Health to undertake a telephone survey of 1,000 randomly selected residents of Toronto. The survey took place in the fall of 2002. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within three percentage points, ninety-five times out of one hundred. The response rate (33.9%) and refusal rate (41.8%) for this survey were better than those of other cross-sectional surveys.

The purpose of the survey was to gauge public support for different possible ways the City can reduce the use of pesticides. The survey was also intended to inform staff and politicians about the public’s perception of possible strategies to reduce non-essential uses of pesticides including, personal behaviour change, voluntary industry or retailer initiatives and regulation through by-laws. While not the main goal of the survey, respondents were asked about their past use of pesticides or alternatives and therefore the results give an idea of recent use of pesticides on residential properties in the City of Toronto.

The survey sample distribution showed close correlation with figures for the City’s Census data for geographic area (former municipality), gender, age and type of residence indicating that it was largely representative of the City’s population. The survey over-represented those with higher levels of education and under-represented those with the lowest level of household income compared to the Census data.

Key Findings

Opinion about the City of Toronto reducing the use of pesticides outdoors

- A large proportion of respondents were in favour (86%) of the City of Toronto reducing the use of pesticides outdoors. Respondents identified concerns about the environment and human health as the primary reasons for being in favour. Some also mentioned that they preferred using natural methods in lawn care.
- Those opposed (8%) were concerned about pests and weeds and also concerned about the effectiveness and efficiency of alternative methods. As well, those opposed were concerned about government involvement in this type of regulation.

Ways the City of Toronto can reduce the use of pesticides outdoors

- Respondents were asked whether they were in favour or opposed to a number of ways that the City of Toronto might reduce the use of pesticides. Among these were possible retailer and lawn care initiatives, such as stores providing more information about and greater availability of alternative products. Respondents also provided their opinion on whether lawn care companies should increase their offering of alternative lawn care programs.
- There was very high support (> 90%) for methods involving possible retailer and lawn care company initiatives as ways for the City to reduce the use of pesticides outdoors.

Respondents were also asked their opinion of seven different by-law scenarios that the City might implement to reduce outdoor uses of pesticides.

- Although support was comparatively less for the various by-law options, there was nearly 90% support for restricting outdoor pesticide use close to schools, daycares, hospitals and homes for the aged. Greater than 80% of respondents were also supportive of restrictions for uses on public property, commercial property and within a certain distance of homes where the owners registered their property as “pesticide-free” areas.
- Support drops under 80% for restricting pesticide use on golf courses and private property but overall, remains above 70%.
- Support for implementing by-laws to reduce pesticide use was higher among women, those who had not used pesticides in the previous two years, those who had used alternatives to pesticides in the past and those who reported being very likely to use alternatives to pesticides in the future.
- Those opposed to the possible regulatory strategies presented to reduce pesticide use in the City of Toronto accounted for between one-eighth to about one-quarter of survey respondents depending on the specific by-law scenario presented.
- A greater percentage of those with a total household income over \$120,000 per year were more likely to oppose the implementation of by-laws than those in other income levels.

- Those who had used pesticides were generally less supportive of regulatory strategies to reduce pesticide use. In addition, those who had hired a company or individual to maintain their lawn or garden in the past were generally less supportive of regulatory strategies to reduce pesticide use.

Use of Pesticides

- Of 1,000 respondents, 76% had a lawn or garden or trees (n=758).
- Of those respondents with a lawn or garden or trees, 33% indicated that pesticides were used on their property in 2001 or 2002, 64% did not use pesticides and 3% did not respond.
- Furthermore, 27% of those with a lawn or garden and trees hired a company or individual to maintain their lawn or garden.
- Of the householders who applied pesticides to their property themselves, 40% also hired a company or individual to maintain their lawn or garden.
- Of those with a lawn or garden and trees who had received service from a company or individual, 62% stated that pesticides were used and 13% did not know if pesticides were used.
- Specific subgroups of the survey sample were more likely to report use of pesticides than others. Individuals with higher income or who were in older age groups or who had less than grade 9 education more often reported that pesticides had been used outdoors in the past two years.

Use of alternative methods or products

- Overall, 46% of respondents with a lawn or garden and trees used alternative products).
- Of those who used an alternative to pesticides, 30% also hired a company or individual to maintain their lawn or garden.

Likelihood of using alternative products or methods

Most people (>70% of all respondents) indicated that they would be very (44%) or somewhat likely (30%) to use alternative products or methods in the future.

Perceived barriers to using alternative products or methods

- Perceived barriers to using alternatives to pesticides included cost, ineffectiveness, uncertainty about side effects (including perceived harmful effects), lack of knowledge about alternatives, lesser availability, and their inefficiency and inconvenience.

Implications

The survey results indicate that there is strong support (86%) for the City of Toronto reducing the use of pesticides outdoors. Survey respondents explained that their support for the City's initiative was related to concerns about the environment and human health. Those opposed to the City's initiative (8%) explained that they had concerns about pests, including insects such as mosquitoes, about weeds, as well as about the effectiveness of alternatives to pesticides. While opinions varied depending on the characteristics of the individual (for example income, gender, past use of pesticides, and so on) overall, there was still strong support among all groups of respondents for a City initiative to reduce pesticides outdoors.

When asked their opinion about possible ways the City could reduce pesticides outdoors, there was very high support for possible retailer and lawn care company initiatives to increase the availability of and information about alternatives. Most respondents also indicated a willingness to use alternative products themselves in the future. If retailers and the lawn care industry are encouraged to make alternatives to pesticide use more readily available and less costly (cost, availability and knowledge were key barriers of use), more people may voluntarily change their behaviour and attitudes about lawn care approaches.

Most respondents also reported being in favour of the various regulatory strategies presented. Support was highest (88%) for a by-law restricting pesticides close to schools, day cares and homes for the aged. Seventy-two percent of respondents supported a by-law restricting pesticides on all private property, including theirs and their neighbours. Opinions on possible regulatory approaches to reduce pesticides outdoors also varied depending on the characteristics of the individual (for example income, gender, and type of residence). These analyses indicated that among all groups of respondents, approval was high for the various by-law options.

The survey indicated that householders with lawns, gardens or trees use a variety of approaches to caring for their properties. More than 33% of households with a lawn or garden or trees had had pesticides applied to them in the recent past. Pesticide use was more likely among those with higher income, older age and lower level of education. Over a quarter of these households had employed a company to maintain their lawn, garden or trees, most of these (62%) reporting that pesticides had been used by the company. Most of the households with a lawn or garden or trees reported using either no pesticides or specifically using alternative products or methods to maintain their properties. Nearly three-quarters of the entire survey sample reported a willingness to use alternative products or methods in the future.